The Homeward Ship

Analytic Tropes as Maps of and for African-Diaspora Cultural History

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I have been in love with Africa since I was five years old, partly owing to a book. Physically, all that is left of my *Illustrated Book about Africa* by Felix Sutton and H. B. Vestal (1959) is the front cover and the first thirty pages of text and vivid lithographs, along with the strips of masking tape with which my mother had, on multiple occasions, repaired it. Through these pages, I learned of the desert aoudad, the Egyptian cobra, the rock hyrax, the fennec, and the bustard, as well as the "jungle" okapi, few of which I had ever seen in the zoo. I then spent years searching for these creatures in American zoos, game parks, pet shops, and books. Nothing in the book, however, fascinated me as much as the "plate-lipped Sara women," the kente-draped Ashanti, the "blue-veiled Tuaregs," the Bedouin falconer, the leg-o-mutton-sleeved Herero woman, and the "Watusi" dancer with his red skirt, dance wands, and colobus-fringed headdress. I have since come to regard this indiscriminate merging of African ethology and ethnology as racist, but this book became the seed, or the roots, of my equally indiscriminate love for Africa and longing to embrace her.

Trips through Tropes

Yet that embrace came by the grace of multiple matchmakers. Before I ever flew to Africa, I met her through a Cuban *santera*—as the practitioners of the African-inspired Santería, or *Ocha*, religion are called—who taught Spanish at Howard University, in Washington, D.C. Five gold bangles on her arm quietly announced Dr. Contreras's devotion to and protection by the Yoruba-Atlantic

goddess Ochún. I suspected mystery in their meaning before I knew what they were, and so I reached out with an inquisitive touch. With serpentine speed and balletic grace, Contreras withdrew them just beyond my reach. Following the map laid out by Roger Bastide's *African Religions of Brazil* ([1960] 1978), I also stopped over in Brazil, retracing what he and William Bascom (1972) identified as the great arc of Yoruba influence in the Americas. Consequently, Yorubaland was the capital of the Africa that I sought.

My late sister and role model Yvedt also loved Africa. She followed her passion for African art—a passion stoked by the books and danced lectures of Yale University art history professor Robert Farris Thompson—and connected our family to a great black pilgrimage cycle, which, from the 1960s until the present, has made the journey to Africa almost as important a rite of passage for bourgeois African Americans as the tour of Europe has been for our bourgeois Euro-American friends. Before her time, in the early 1950s, my maternal aunt and her family had lived in Liberia. In the 1970s and 1980s, their ultra-modern New Jersey split-level was decorated with African sculptures, masks, and spears, some of it brought back from Liberia and much of it purchased at a Manhattan gallery called Merchants of Oyo. My Liberian-born cousin ultimately married a Nigerian, as I did, and now both lives and works bi-continentally. A paternal first cousin became Muslim and married a Senegalese man. And long before any of these events, my parents were introduced to each other by their Nigerian classmate at Howard University, a man who (like at least one other Howard classmate) repeatedly hosted my visits and my sister's to Nigeria.

Yet the role of Africa in our lives was never without controversy. Indeed, controversy was a structural element of that role. When I was eight, my little cousin Wade and I were raising a joyous clamor as we shouted and tumbled behind our grandparents' waterfront rambler in Norfolk, Virginia. But for his clothes, shoes, and momentary lack of an entourage, our grandfather looked like a Ghanaian Ashanti chief. Nonetheless, when he angrily threw open the sliding glass door of the house, he shouted, "Shut up that noise! You sound like a bunch of Africans!" With equal measures of innocence and artfulness, I replied, "But, Granddaddy, we are Africans!" He harrumphed and shut the door. I doubt, though, that he managed to resume his nap. Wade and I quieted down, at least for a while, but Granddaddy could hardly shut the door on my words or on the Africa in his back yard.

Despite his West African appearance, Granddaddy was an American Pentecostal bishop. Churches like the scores that he founded across the state of Virginia for the nationwide Church of God in Christ had, in Melville J. Herskovits's model, provided the prime example of Africanisms, or African influences on

American culture—that is, "shouting," or the form of transcendent exclamatio and dance that reveal the presence of the Holy Ghost in the worshipper's body.

My past thirty or so years of research in West Africa, Brazil, and th black-ethnic populations of the United States have in many ways been devoted t the question of what makes me African American, apart from the chocolat brownness of my skin, the fullness of my lips, and the social encumbrances th Granddaddy and I share with other descendants of enslaved Africans. The sort cultural connections that seemed so obvious to Afro-Brazilianists and Afr Cubanists and are so readily named by Brazilians and Cubans have been vigo ously debated among North Americans. This chapter considers how our choice scholarly language shapes real, human lives. How, in sum, does the cask of o descriptive discourse flavor the wine of our pan-American relationship with Afric

Metaphors We Think By

Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) argues th metaphors structure all of our language. They are pervasive. Metaphors can l semi-poetic, as are the following: "He shut the door on Africa," or "this boo became the seed of my love for Africa." Alternatively they can be entirely mundan as are these conventional expressions:

"Of course he's angry: You shot down every point that he made."

"Your claims are indefensible."

"He attacked every weak point in my argument."

"His criticisms were right on target."

"I've never won an argument with him."

All of these expressions embody the conventional metaphor that discussion like war (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 4). Any given metaphor—which compar one thing to another—highlights the similarities between the compared obje and hides the dissimilarities. Thinking of an argument as a war highlights competitive nature and naturalizes the motive of mutual destruction between t participants. What aspects of argument might be better highlighted and enhanc if we compared an argument to, say, lovemaking? "Her thoughts brought me an intellectual climax I could never have imagined." Or "His argument was force and clumsy. A more thoughtful argument might have fulfilled mine rather th tearing it apart."

Lakoff and Johnson say that metaphors are typically natural. For examp "I'm in an up mood" rests, in their opinion, on the tendency of well bodies to vertical and of sick ones to be horizontal. I do not agree that metaphors are typic natural, but they are pervasive, even in our scholarly language. Let us call

metaphors in our scholarly descriptions and analyses "analytic metaphors." I have announced this chapter's concerns with some of the analytic metaphors and other analytic tropes that scholars have employed to highlight what matters in the cultural history linking Africa with its New World diaspora. Here I try to illuminate what is at stake in these linguistic frames.

For each analytic trope I discuss, I tell a story about the dimensions of cultural history that it highlights, as well as the equally valuable dimensions of cultural history that it hides, and, sometimes, the effect that its usage has had on the cultures so described. Hence, like others in this volume, this text might be construed as autobiography. However, and also like others in this volume, it is also a history, an intellectual history of multi-sited ethnography. A range of authors—including Kamari Maxine Clarke, Paulla Ebron, Aihwa Ong, and I—have made field sites of transnationally mobile populations and cross-border identities, rooting our analyses not in a priori theory and secondary references but in the messy currency-changing, language-switching, passport-inspecting, bribe-demanding, police- and customs-inspected, and boundary-filled world of physically itinerant lives.

As intellectual history, this essay excavates the underrecognized, under-examined, and under-exploited scholarly precedents of transnational ethnography in the study of the African diaspora, a task I share with the other contributors to a recent School of American Research collection (Yelvington 2006). As event history, this essay retraces the ignored Afro-Atlantic precedents of today's much-vaunted transnationalism. As autobiography, it narrates why it was difficult for me to overlook these intellectual and historical precedents.

This re-examination of the long-charted routes of black Atlantic cultural history offers both a theoretical model and a critique of the language we have used to describe newer transnational communities, as well as the forms of translocal, trans-ethnic cultural intercourse that have long shaped intra-African cultural history—along trade routes, at the convergence of Tutsi and Hutu, Hausa and Fulani, Bantu and "pygmy" or Khoisan, "Arab" and "African," and so forth. What do the metaphors that scholars use highlight and hide about these complex, mutually transformative interactions? And how do such metaphors reshape local social life on the ground?

Survivals

Melville J. Herskovits was once the whipping boy, but is now the preeminent model, of African American talk about our cultural connection to Africa. The metaphor of "survivals"—or recalcitrant leftovers from a people's historically original state—is the linchpin of his analysis. He asks, What aspects of

African culture "survived" in the Americas? Where did they "survive" and how? I argue that Herskovits's choice of an analytic metaphor begs the question of what he is looking for and where he will look to find it.

It was anthropologist and social evolutionist E. B. Tylor who first established the term *survivals* among the analytic metaphors of early twentieth-century anthropology. For Tylor, the term *survival* referred to the practices left over from lower stages of a society's evolution, which therefore provided evidence that the society had passed through that stage before reaching the present one. Likewise for Herskovits, the term *survival* described the ancient and timelessly African practices left over—in any given New World black population—after acculturation to the dominant Euro-American culture.

This metaphor implies (and Herskovits's investigations assume) that Africa is the past of the American present. They assume that Africa is so unchanging and isolated from the rest of the world that twentieth-century Dahomean culture, for example, could provide evidence of the culture that reached Haiti in the eighteenth century and has survived ever since then. According to the "survival" metaphor Africa is to the past as the black Americas are to the present.

Herskovits was one of a cohort of scholars in the 1920s and 1930s who employed this analytic metaphor and a host of its cousins, including "memories," "heritage," "retention," the sartorial metaphor of "vestiges"—which literally suggest clothing—and its metaphorical extensions. Hortense Powdermaker, for example, shared Herskovits's doubt that captivity had rendered African Americans—in an extension of the clothing metaphor—entirely "culturally naked" (Herskovits [1941] 1958, 29). However, these scholars did not all agree with Herskovits regarding the importance and depth of African "survivals."

Herskovits's major contribution was to amplify these metaphors by inverting the sartorial image of the "vestige." Hence, rather than the African American wearing his or her Africanness on the outside, he or she is said to contain or embody his or her inheritance as an unconscious "underlying logic" or "bent" within apparently Euro-American external forms, such as being filled enthusiastically with the Holy Ghost in the midst of Sunday meetings at Granddaddy's Church of God in Christ. Nonetheless, all of these analytic metaphors suggest that African Americans' contact with Africa is limited to the past and that the "survival," "memory," "vestige," or "retention" is like a self-existent, unchanging object bequeathed to the living by dead forebears.

This unchanging object will appear, over time, in different clothing or behind different masks, but the object remains the same. In imitation of Afro-Brazilianist Arthur Ramos, Herskovits called this re-clothing or masking "syncretism." The paradigm case is the Afro-Latin American "masking" of African gods behind the

statues and lithographs of Catholic saints. For example, among *santeros* in Cuba and its diaspora, statues of Saint Bárbara, patroness of firefighters, are used to represent the Yoruba-affiliated god of thunder, lightning, and fire, Changó. By extension, Herskovits regarded "shouting" in black North American Protestant churches, like Granddaddy's, as a syncretic survival of an ancient African religious practice—that is, an instance of African spirit possession adapted to and hid behind a Western Christian name and conception of God.

Finally, all of these analytic metaphors suggest that the worn or embodied cultural heirloom makes little functional or structural difference in the lives of the heirs. No matter how much they "shout," African American Christians still form *Christian* churches. No matter how much like Africans they rhythmically sing and hoe the fields, the row still gets hoed and planted with the master's cotton or sugar.

Yet, in my observation, Africa does make a functional and structural difference in African American lives. For example, in more than a trivial sense, I am reminded of the role of Africa in Granddaddy's and my misunderstandings and self-understandings. Our gaze toward Africa and the images it revealed have been structural and functional in both of our lives, though perhaps to opposite effects. I am alive because of both ancient and modern Africa: the aforementioned connections at Howard University between my parents and Nigerian classmates in the 1950s. I married an African woman—another daughter of Oşun, according to one Brazilian priest's revelation—and my whole career is based on the study of Africa. Although he looked like an Ashanti chief, Granddaddy's relationship to Africa was litotic—that is, structured by the trope of negation.

We employ the trope of litotes when, in response to "How are you?" we reply, "Not bad." We say what we are not, allowing the listener to infer logically what we are. Most of the time, litotes suggest understatement, but not always. Blackface minstrelsy, for example, allowed Irish and Jewish immigrants—whose whiteness had long been doubted in Europe—to amplify their difference from the black anti-citizen of the U.S. republic and thereby ratify their own whiteness and worthiness of citizenship. The white pancake makeup around their eyes revealed their "real" whiteness underneath, in contrast to the blackness of the burnt cork on the rest of the face. Even black immigrants to the United States participate in this process of litotic self-fashioning. Many black immigrants endeavor to declare in word, accent, and deed, "We're not like black Americans," partly in order to discipline their children and to claim exemption from the racism that encumbers black American lives. Similarly, Granddaddy was not-African. He thought that his affirmation of African inferiority and his simultaneous denial of our behavioral

likeness to Africans would lift from black Americans' shoulders the excuse for our oppression. Nonetheless, or really therefore, Africa remained central to his self-construction and mine. We could no more divest ourselves of our inward preoccupation with Africa than we could remove our chocolate skins.

Moreover, contrary to the implications of the "survival" metaphor, both our respective understandings of Africa and Africans derived from contemporary sources—mine came from a book and his from missionary adventure tales and segregationist apologetics. Neither of our perceptions was an object handed down from the African forebears who disembarked at Jamestown or Charleston. Also contrary to Herskovits's model, then, the continuing role of African cultural history in our lives did not depend on our isolation and poverty, which Herskovits said were the usual conditions of African "survivals" in the Americas. So the above story speaks to what Herskovits's metaphor hid: that Africa is alive in the literary, religious, educational, and touristic lives of the urban and often the elite black Americas.

The next story speaks even more directly to Herskovits's assumptions. The locus classicus of Herskovits's African "survivals" in the United States is the Gullah, or Geechee, people of the South Carolina Low-Country and Sea Coast Islands. They have long been the focus of scholarly investigations into what remains culturally African about black North Americans. Various scholars have sought to explain the Gullahs' local subculture in terms of "survivals" of Gola culture, in what is now Sierra Leone. Indeed, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the rice planters of the Sea Coast Islands drew many of their workers from the rice-growing regions of Sierra Leone and Liberia, and the term *Gullah* might derive from the Sierra Leonean ethnonym "Gola."

On the other hand, captives had come to these islands from many other regions of Africa as well, and students of the local creole language variety also known as *Gullah* have identified an extremely diverse set of African origins in its lexicon and in its justly famous basket-making tradition. Thus, some leading authorities identify "Angola," a land far away from Sierra Leone, as the more likely source of the term *Gullah* (Rosengarten 1986, 1997; L. Turner 1949).

In my grandfather's day, Africanness was a source of shame, but now Oprah proudly receives the DNA evidence that she is ancestrally Kpelle, and Whoopi receives her Zulu ancestry with equal pride. As black North Americans have grown more willing to embrace Africa as a cultural model and emblem of collective identity, the "acculturation" of the Gullahs—that is, the decline of their distinctive language and crafts—has been reversed. For example, the "Africanness" of Gullah basketry has become its major selling point and a source of income for many

craftswomen in coastal South Carolina, increasing the incentive of basket-sewers to produce reputedly African basketry forms (such as rice fanners) and even to wear African clothes.

However, it was Joseph Opala (Euro-American anthropologist and former member of the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone) who recently established the local conviction that Sierra Leone in particular was the source of the islanders' Africanness and the appropriate target of their "return" to the motherland. Moreover, the interest in this ahistorically specific tie was reciprocal. In 1986, Sierra Leonean president Joseph Momo paid a highly public visit to the Sea Coast Islands and encouraged the islanders to visit what he called their "ancestral homeland," which is precisely what a party of them did in 1989.

President Momo continued the American tradition of attributing the islanders' linguistic distinctiveness to their African roots, and he identified the similarity of the South Carolinian Gullah language to Sierra Leonean Krio, or Creole, as proof. Note that he drew no such connection between Gullah language and similarly named Sierra Leonean Gola language. Unlike Gola, both South Carolinian Gullah and Sierra Leonean Krio are predominantly English in their lexicons, since Krio initially came about due to the interaction among African American returnees to West Africa and diverse British-educated recaptives—that is, captives from other parts of Africa rescued by the British from slave ships bound for the Americas. Sierra Leonean Krio is also indebted to the language of British colonial administrators and Anglophone missionaries in Freetown. Thus, these Sierra Leonean and South Carolinian creole language varieties share features primarily on account of the parallel circumstances of their genesis, not on account of Gullah's being a "survival," "retention," "memory," "vestige," or "underlying logic" of Krio—much less of Gola or any Angolan language.

In sum, the shared features of the Gullah and Krio language varieties are highly ambiguous evidence of the Gullah people's Sierra Leonean or even African roots. However, given the shared will to recognize such linguistic similarities as the product of "survivals," Gullah has become a powerful emblem of a new "Kinship across the Seas"—between Gullahs and Sierra Leoneans. Despite the ambiguity of linguistic evidence in this celebrated case, Creole language furnishes the second most influential analytic metaphor—after "survivals"—in African diaspora cultural history.

Creolization

African Americanist cultural history is indebted to Sidney Mintz and Richard Price ([1976] 1992) for their "creolization" model. This model

emphasizes the New World social institutions, organizations, and sanctione spaces that made the practice of African creative models possible in the America According to Mintz and Price, African American populations came to the Americ equipped not with whole and particular African cultures (like Gola culture, f example) but with the hodgepodge of beliefs and practices that the cultural heterogeneous "crowds" of Africans brought to any given New World local New, African American cultures formed in the spaces and around the aspects social life where the dominant planter class allowed African American cultures be distinctive.

Moreover, argue Mintz and Price, these newly African American cultures toc shape quickly and enduringly—first, on the slave ships and then in the early yea of any given American slave society. They formed quickly because they had address the local need for people of diverse aboriginal cultures and languages wh were laboring under the same plantation labor regime to communicate an cooperate immediately with their masters and with each other.

Mintz and Price's creole language metaphor, particularly when it is interprete in the light of the white-dominant plantations that are its inspiration, sugges that African American cultures are internally systematic and bounded loc systems. They are walled off by the slaves' immobility, the masters' restriction and the long-term stability of the resulting local social systems. No longer, aft Mintz and Price, could we follow Herskovits in merely counting up the arbitrari ordered and nonfunctional heirlooms that Herskovits traced to the African past.

In the 1980s, Brazilianists told a story about Afro-Brazilian religions that bea out many implications of the creolization model. In the Afro-Brazilian Candomb and Xangô religions, as among Afro-Cuban religions, the Yoruba-affiliated denom nations enjoy a prestige far out of proportion with their number of adherents (an out of proportion with the number of captives who arrived from what is no Yorubaland). Moreover, the Yoruba-affiliated denominations have been funde by the state and the bourgeoisie and protected from the police in many cases whe other ethnically coded denominations have been denied funding and protection.

Yet, contrary to Mintz and Price's linguistically based view that such creol cultures form quickly and then endure, the Brazilianist literature of the 198c suggests that Yoruba prestige is a late development and results from nothin aboriginally Yoruba but, instead, from the willingness of many Yoruba-affiliate temples to change their practices according to the aesthetic demands and politic interests of their white patrons. For example, they had to disavow so-called blac magic and wear white clothes instead of colorful prints. Moreover, by acceptin the premise that they belonged to a distinct, African culture, they consented t their enduring marginalization from the state and the capitalist economy.

However, like Mintz and Price, the advocates of this interpretation of Afro-Brazilian religion—who include Peter Fry, Beatriz Gois Dantas, Jim Wafer, Diana Brown, Colin Henfrey, and Roberto Motta—assign a defining and structural role to the local, American political and institutional context in the formation of discrete, internally integrated, local creole cultures (i.e., patronage). This local integration of bounded, discrete cultures is analogous to structuralist visions of how languages work—that is, as closed, internally ordered, synchronic systems—hence the paradigmatic role given to creole languages in Mintz and Price's creolization model.

Collective Memory

I tell a somewhat different story about how the prestige and sponsorship of the Yoruba-Atlantic denominations came about. But let me introduce it with a reflection upon an analytic metaphor that regularly overlaps with the "creolization" metaphor. That is, the conception of "collective memory" and "forgetting" as the chief mechanism of sociocultural reproduction and the chief mechanism of diasporas' relationship to their homelands. Roger Bastide, Joan Dayan, Karen McCarthy Brown, and others have followed Maurice Halbwachs in arguing that the preservation of myths, for example, can occur only when the social relationships or places to which they refer or the institutions to which they are relevant remain intact. Bastide argues, for example, that the Yorùbá goddess Yemọja continues to be thought of as a mother in Brazil because lower-class Afro-Brazilian families tend to be what Bastide calls "matriarchal" ([1960] 1978).

Yet the failings of his "collective memory" metaphor are also instructive. It hides a great deal. For example, there are ways in which the reproduction of an image or the teaching and learning of a technique in society are not self-evidently forms of "preservation." They are as likely to be forms of appropriation, quoting, mockery, propagandistic nostalgia, and so forth. For example, when a child mocks her parent's order to "Hang up your coat, Janet! Hang up your coat!" she does not, in any simple sense, "remember" her parent's order. She displays her objection to it, rehearses future resistance to it, and gives a sign that she will "forget" to hang up her coat the next time she comes home. Likewise, virtually every African American movie these days makes a visual joke of a flamboyantly effeminate gay person. Only at a superficial level does the continual propagation of this image appear to "remember" the presence of gay people in our community. Its conspicuous intent is to ridicule, condemn, and marginalize that presence, and its conspicuous effect is less to reproduce that social role over time than to drive it underground.

Of course, few scholarly theorists are unaware of the nonliteral and sometimes deliberately distorting effects of recollection, but the term *memory*, with its usual, commonsense implication of involuntarism and disinterestedness, does little to clarify the highly political and nonliteral character of recollection, commemoration, and the reproduction of behaviors in their real social context. To the extent that it has a social reality or effect, all memory is *commemoration*—always selective, tendentious, selectively acknowledged, and acted upon in keeping with the interests of the powerful. "Memory" is too simple a metaphor for this process.

In an example more central to my argument, the following is the sort of "memory" that Afro-Bahian allies of the Candomblé articulated about Africa. Here I quote one Afro-Bahian who was interviewed by Donald Pierson in the late 1930s: "These people here in Bahia think Africans are all barbarous and uncivilized. They won't believe we write our language and that books are printed in it. . . . They don't know that in Lagos there are good schools, better than they've got in Bahia. Look at this [said Pierson's informant, pointing at the photograph of a school in Lagos]! Is there anything in Bahia as fine as that?" (Pierson 1942, 272).

I am not questioning the truth of this recollection, just pointing out the motivated and selective nature of recollection and its power in contesting enemy ideological positions. Thus, recollection—that is, the most literal type of memory—and, even more so, performances like commemorative parades involve a degree and type of nonliteralism and agency hidden by Bastide's "memory" metaphor.

Though Bastide understood Candomblé to be a socially structured but involuntary "memory" of Africa and 1980s ethnographers of Candomblé regard it as the product of white, bourgeois manipulation, these scholars were probably quite aware that leading figures in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Candomblé—such as Martiniano do Bonfim, Felisberto Sowzer, and Joaquim Devodê Branco—were transatlantic travelers who frequented Lagos and Porto Novo (Matory 2005). These travelers were often fluent in English or French, and like some of their counterparts in Afro-Cuban religion, many studied in Anglophone West African mission schools, where their teachers were Anglophone Africans.

On their return journeys from Lagos to Bahia and Havana, they carried with them not just the memories of a past Africa but also the cultural nationalism of late nineteenth-century Lagos, which was then a British colony. In Lagos, rising British racism during the 1880s and 1890s had inspired a lively literary and cultural movement called the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance, which documented the diverse regional practices that this movement would redefine as "Yoruba" culture and proclaimed the unique dignity of that culture.

This new "Yoruba" ethnic identity amalgamated a number of previously distinct cultural strands. The term *Yoruba* appears to come from a term that the

Hausa people used for Ọyọ, a savannah kingdom that would only later be amalgamated with the Ẹgba, the Ẹgbado, the Ijẹbu, the Ifẹ, the Awori, and so forth within the same, pan-ethnic identity (ethnic groups in what are now Nigeria and the People's Republic of Benin). This pan-ethnic identity probably first took shape in the slave forts of West Africa and on the auction blocks of the Americas. Many African American ethnic identities were named by maritime slave traders after the African port of embarkation, where captives of diverse ethnic affiliations were normally gathered together.

As Gerhard Kubik points out, the ethnonyms that came to describe Africans in the New World were initially little more than "trademarks" (1979). The bearers of these trademarks did not become ethnic groups for themselves in the Americas because they had always been that in Africa. Rather, they came to think of themselves as unified ethnic groups for a series of accumulating reasons. They did so, first, because people gathered from the same African port were, in the Americas, often selected by the same buyers for their similar technical skills and, second, because the Roman Catholic church often missionized them through trademark-targeted brotherhoods. What cultural similarities they discovered in the Americas had clearly not been salient or relevant to these populations in Africa.

The Lucumí in Cuba and the Nagô in Brazil were among those "trademark" groups that became ethnic groups for themselves for the first time in the Americas. Only much later did their ethnic counterparts in Africa receive the name *Yoruba*. They first received that name not in what is now called Yorubaland but in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Black missionary Samuel Ajayi Crowther cobbled together a new and hybrid dialect intended to be equally comprehensible to the Ọyọ, the Ẹgba, the Ẹgbado, the Awori, the Ijẹbu, and so forth, who, again, had never previously thought of themselves as a single ethnic group. Crowther and his collaborators reduced that language to writing—the first book in this language was the Bible—making it into an emblem of the new ethnic identity.

Much of its vocabulary came from the diaspora; the new capital of this new ethnic group—Lagos—was built by Afro-Brazilian hands in Brazilian architectural style. And just as the returnees helped to create Yoruba identity in West Africa, so did the products of West African cultural nationalism transform Latin American cultures. For example, the nineteenth-century founder of Afro-Brazilian studies (Raimundo Nina Rodrigues) and the twentieth-century founder of Afro-Cuban studies (Fernando Ortiz) read the publications of the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance and cited them as proof of Yoruba superiority to other Africans. They cited this literature in the defense of the Yoruba-affiliated denominations in Brazil and Cuba.

Rodrigues relied on the translations and interpretations of his informant Martiniano do Bonfim, who had himself introduced numerous innovations into

Afro-Bahian religious practice, based not upon what they learned in Ọyọ, the hinterland kingdom whose gods predominate in Brazilian Candomblé and Cuban Santería, but upon his own fictive elaborations of Ọyọ history. The occasion of this Afro-Brazilian priest's elaborations was a sojourn in Lagos between 1875 and 1886.

Martiniano's parents had sent him to attend a Presbyterian School in British colonial Lagos, and he was simultaneously being trained as a *babalawo*, or divination priest. When he returned to Bahia, he used his prestige and credibility to invent "African" traditions for which there had been no African precedents. For example, he fabricated an Ọyọ institution that would justify the founding of an Afro-Brazilian institution by the same name. At the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá temple, he founded a set of offices called the 12 Ministers of Xangô—secular sponsors drawn largely from the unreligious Bahian bourgeoisie. Yet Martiniano claimed to be restoring Candomblé to its original form. Martiniano used this invention to confer distinction upon and to bring additional bourgeois sponsorship to his protégé—Mãe Aninha, whose temple then came to be regarded as the most "purely African" and unchanging of Afro-Brazilian—and possibly all African-diaspora—religious institutions.

The "survival," "memory," and "creolization" metaphors are insufficient to account for the most important elements of this history—the wishful, strategic, selective, border-crossing, and dialectical self-inventions that produce ethnic identities, not only in the black Atlantic world but everyplace else as well. Indeed, those analytic metaphors persuaded scholars who probably knew full well of the candomblecistas' transatlantic travels to overlook those travels or to ignore their powerfully transformative effects. Linear genealogy and bounded spaces of cultural autonomy—both implicit in the reigning family of African diasporist analytic metaphors—are less maps of real cultural history than declarations of future, nation-style independence.

Growing Pains: A Family of Metaphors in Conflict

As I noted earlier in this essay, the objects that fall under a given rubric condition ways of understanding those objects and, by contrast, other objects. Our ways of expressing knowledge and understanding exchange of knowledge shape knowledge itself: metaphors matter. Metaphors of plant growth and reproduction have furnished another family of metaphors of cultural history. Yet the plant kingdom furnishes a diverse set of forms from which to select, each suggesting a different vision of the units and flows that constitute cultural

reproduction. Next, I will address a few of these forms and the productive controversies they have fertilized.

First are the popular "roots" and "diaspora" metaphors: both might be regarded as elements of what Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987) call "arborescent metaphors." The term *roots* compares (1) the relationship between (1a) an ancestral or homeland culture and (1b) its descendants or diaspora to (2) the relationship between (2a) the roots of a plant and (2b) its trunk, branches, or leaves. The term *roots* suggests unidirectional, upward flow of the substances that constitute the plant's life and integrity. It suggests the temporal later-ness and superiority of the branches, along with the rudimentariness, primitivity, dirtiness, lowliness, and lack of refinement of the roots.

The term *diaspora*, too, is an arborescent metaphor in that it compares the dispersion of a people or way of life to the dissemination and germination of seeds. Diaspora inverts, without subverting, the premises that also underlie the *roots* metaphor. Imagined in terms of diaspora, the history of a culture involves the same unidirectional spread and temporal inequality that "roots" suggests. "Diaspora" also implies the unique authenticity, the unchanging nature, and the defining character of the homeland.

On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari identify in "rhizomes" a non-arborescent plant morphology, a metaphor of cultural history that, in their view, is less beholden to the authoritarian presumptions of the state, and one that better illuminates the non-ancestral and crosscutting flows that shape any given nation or community. It was Paul Gilroy (1993) who first called attention to the virtues of this metaphor in African diaspora cultural history. However, "rhizomes" is not yet in wide enough use to reveal a clear pattern of assumptions in its scholarly usage.

In comparison to the arborescent metaphors, "rhizome" is intended, advantageously, to undermine the presumption of hierarchy and the centralization of legitimacy. It challenges the monopoly of rulers and of direct ancestors over the definition of cultural authority and group membership. Yet the biological source of this metaphor suggests a unity of organism rather than of process, an implication ill-suited, in my view, to the realities of cultural history. Culture does not come in temporally, geographically, or populationally bounded units. It is our metaphors and metonyms that chop it up into units and map a logic of collective being and action.

To my mind, any social units comparable to organisms in the history of circum-Atlantic movements and transformations of people and ideas—such as races, tribes, classes, nations, religious denominations, or the whole of the circum-Atlantic family of cultures and nations—are falling apart and regrouping on a daily, if not hourly, basis. That is, in any given hour, a person might act primarily in

coordination with his or her nation and might, in the next hour, act in coordination with his or her race, ethnic group, or religion. Moreover, the criteria for belonging in any of these groupings is under constant debate.

The "rhizomes" metaphor might be adaptable to these facts. Severed segments of a rhizome system can form new and distinct organisms, but as far as I am aware, once a daughter organism has formed, it can never reunite as the same organism with its mother. Human social groupings can. Cuttings and graftings are human actions, inevitably distorted by the apparent clarity of plant metaphors from pristine nature.

"Rhizomes" inspired Paul Gilroy's reprise of several key analytic tropes from the existing African-diaspora literature—"syncretism," "creolization," "ethnohistory," and "black Atlantic" itself. In a most ironic case of the neglect of the lessons of African-diaspora scholarship, Gilroy appears to overlook the origin of these terms and concepts in a body of work that he dismisses—sometimes unfairly—as "essentialist."

The most memorable analytic trope that he draws from this literature is the "ship." Gilroy describes the cultural history of the African diaspora primarily as a discontinuous cultural exchange—as if conveyed by an anchorless ship—moving among diverse African-diaspora populations. Ships and other such vehicles moved African people and their descendants from place to place, during and after the slave trade, enabling them to influence each other across national boundaries. Books, records, and ideas moved similarly, undermining both the notion that what geographically dispersed African-diaspora populations have in common is mainly African "survivals" and the notion that African-diaspora cultures are self-contained and separated from each other by national borders.

Drawing examples primarily from the English-speaking black populations of England, the United States, and the Caribbean, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* argues that the shared cultural features of African-diaspora groups result far less from shared survivals or cultural memories of Africa than from black Atlantic populations' mutually influential responses to their shared exclusion from the benefits of the Enlightenment legacy of national citizenship and political equality in the West. In charting the history of Anglophone black Atlantic culture, Gilroy's "ship" metonym prioritizes cultural exchange across territorial boundaries over the territorially divergent but uninterrupted "memory" of Africa posited by Bastide and followers of Melville J. Herskovits.

Yet Gilroy remains curiously comfortable with the notion of the African diaspora's continuous "memory" of slavery. For example, Gilroy believes that black Atlantic ballads about lost love symbolically commemorate slavery. But when genres inaugurated by one ethnic group, nationality, or race are adopted by another (such as soul music in Jamaica, reggae in Puerto Rico, or rumba in Wes

Africa and Congo/Zaïre), whose collective past is being "remembered," who is the rememberer? Weren't the regimes of slavery in the different "remembering" communities, nations, and regions different? Wouldn't the diversity of named musical genres suggest that the rememberers are diverse and at least partially constituted by nationality or locality?

Yet Gilroy, like transnationalism theorist Arjun Appadurai (1990), represents the territorial nation and the local identities it generates as contradictions to (rather than agents or optional objectives of) these ship-borne cultural crossings. Yes, local identities are in dialogue with each other across borders, but bounded identities continue to structure much of the dialogue. That is, the exchange of ideas, objects, and personnel certainly crosscuts national, ethnic, and other social boundaries. However, numerous and powerful social actors retain a stake in defining and policing those boundaries and in speaking for the populations conditionally confined by them. The power to speak on behalf of a group, to protect its monopoly on certain resources or means of livelihood, and to determine access to those resources and means keeps collective identities passionately alive and impossible for cross-cultural interlocutors to ignore. The contents and boundaries are ever-changing—often under the influence of boundary-crossers—but the elaborately drafted obituaries of nation-state, race, and tribe are not ready for publication.

The fact of extensive exchange across locales and populations should not blind us to the fact that reifications of the bounded social group—such as those implicit in arborescent metaphors and other organic metaphors of society (i.e., representations of society as a living body)—perform real and powerful work on behalf of the social and political actors who invoke them. And no actor can ignore these social facts, in even the most translocal of interactions.

And if, for Gilroy, "collective memory" usefully highlights something about Afro-Atlantic people's relationship to their past, why is the "memory" of Africa selected for denial in Gilroy's model? The credibility of this representation of black Atlantic cultural history relies less on disproof of Africa's role than on a silence about it. I offer, then, the briefest summary of an alternative analytic metaphor in the cultural history of the black Atlantic, one that begs no questions about the tropes and touchstones that people can use to think their collectiveness into being.

Dialogue

My metaphor of a black Atlantic "dialogue" (Matory [1994] 2005; 1999; 2005) suggests that Gullahs and Sierra Leoneans, Yoruba people and the

New World worshippers of the gods that became Yoruba, African Americans, black Britons and Jamaicans, and light and dark Brazilians are not discrete systems or cultures but participants in a continuous, mutually transformative dialogue. No local population is an isolated collective rememberer of or heir to a self-contained national past. Rather, collectivizing recollections and other performances are responses to the claims of other self-proclaimed classes of actors.

Ethnic or national groupings articulate the boundaries that separate them not insofar as they have historically been insulated and isolated from one another but insofar as they have engaged in dialogue and confrontation with each other. The metaphor of Afro-Atlantic dialogue places traditions—or strategically constructed genealogies of cultural reproduction—into a context beyond nation and region, into a larger, transoceanic context. Local cultures do not result merely from inheritance or from the local inertia of quick-forming, slow-changing systems. Rather, actors produce their cultures in dialogue.

Yet that dialogue is not a conversation among equals. It draws together more powerful and less powerful actors. Relative wealth, linguistic proficiency, nationality, and unequal access to the means of communication and reward distinguish one class of actors from another. On the other hand, the "dialogue" metaphor does posit one type of equality: temporal equality. It posits the radical coevalness (see Fabian 1983) of Africa, Latin America, and the United States in a dialogue that, even following the conclusion of the slave trade, has continually reshaped all of these regions. In other words, Africa is not to its diaspora as the past is to the present. Rather, Africa is an ongoing interlocutor in the cultural history that shapes us all—no less in North America than in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Equally evident is the fact that metaphors through which we think of our African American connection to Africa shape how we live our lives. For me, a Yoruba proverb sums up this phenomenon well: "Ewe ti d'ọṣẹ"—"The leaf has become the soap." Though it usually refers to how long-resident outsiders become insiders to the community, it also suggests that a leaf wrapping that once gathered up and shaped a quantity of soap eventually disappears into that soap ball, and only the historically wise are aware that the shape of the soap ball derived not from the soap but from a now-invisible leaf. Such is the role of analytic tropes in reshaping the social realities that they once only poetically described. It is when the metaphor dies that it becomes the most inescapable map for a lived reality.

Hence, in the 1970s and 1980s, the "roots" and "survivals" metaphors offered African Americans a new way of imagining and interacting with Africa. These metaphors modeled and mimed our increased willingness to dress, marry, worship, and conduct religious or heritage tourism in ways that we understood to reflect a timelessly African past. A new understanding of our "kinship across the seas"

persuaded us—in the Free South Africa Movement and the movement to stop the atrocities of Sudanese Arabs against that country's black population—to intervene in the African present.

However, the "survival" and "roots" metaphors also have a way of turning real Africans into Afrocentric cardboard cutouts no more real than the "Ubangis" in Tarzan movies. They leave us surprised by the complexities of modern African life, naive in our disregard of cultural differences, and nonplussed by West Africans' failure to recognize the so-called slave forts of the coast as our Auschwitz—holy ground not to be contaminated by beautification or commercialization. Unlike African American heritage tourists, many Africans think of the slave forts as the sites of all sorts of profitable commerce, past and future.

Now that many of us not only study and travel to Africa but also have African immigrant neighbors and spouses, I ask you to imagine how much more productive the dialogue might be if we recognized its rich precedents—precedents that have involved as much commerce, musical exchange, mutual religious conversion, and transatlantic struggles against European domination as survivals of a four-century-old past.

White Africans

I conclude with one further story of a cultural process poorly highlighted or comprehended by existing analytic metaphors of African or African American cultural history. In the early 1980s, Nigerian diviner Wande Abimbọla, Afro-Puerto Rican *santera* Marta Vega, and Afro-Brazilian Candomblé priestess Mãe Stella attempted to form an international coalition based upon their and their followers' common worship of the *orişa*, or Yoruba gods. This unification effort was based on the long-standing premise that these traditions shared common African "roots" and, therefore, a common African essence. For this reason, in the view of Mãe Stella and many followers of this movement, it was time to eject the Roman Catholic saints from Candomblé and Santería, or Ocha.

Tensions first arose when Africa's definitional centrality as the roots of *orişa* religion seemed, in Abimbọla's view, to suggest that the venue of *orişa*-worshippers' world conference should return in alternating years to Ile-Ifẹ, the mythical origin of Yoruba civilization. Vega argued, on the contrary, that the conferences should begin in Ifẹ but then circulate among six American *orişa*-worshipping capitals before then returning to Ifẹ. The ranking authorities in each of the American locales objected to a further entailment of Africa's centrality—that Abimbọla and other Nigerian-born priests were more authentic in their practice and therefore, in general, possessed greater religious authority than the American priests.

Mãe Stella and Marta Vega decamped from this arrangement once its hierarchical implications became clear. They redefined themselves functionally not as Africans (or inferior American facsimiles thereof) but as a *candomblecista* and a *santera* (and as superior exemplars of those categories). The collectives most willing to accept their redefinition as "African" were those with the least seniority and status within the American systems. For example, the Italian-Brazilian *candomblecistas* of São Paulo, who have only recently converted from the more hybrid Umbanda religion, not only fully embraced Abimbọla's authority but are also the most likely among the American worshippers to wear African clothing during their rituals.

The "roots" metaphor suggests that the worshippers of African gods around the Atlantic perimeter are of one and the same organism or family. And it would seem to legitimize Abimbọla's unique authority, while the "survival" metaphor invites a restoration of the putatively lapsed integrity of the shared heritage, lending further support to Abimbọla's authority. The "collective memory" metaphor would do little to explain the African-centered conduct of the Italian-Brazilian converts to Candomblé, but it could do equally potent work (1) to justify either the discreteness of each local tradition of *orişa* worship or, alternatively, (2) to legitimize the Nigerian priesthood's centrality and unique authority. I have heard priests employ this metaphor in both ways. On the one hand, in the 1970s and 1980s, Abimbọla (1976) and other Yoruba scholars praised priests in the diaspora for having "remembered" an extraordinary amount of Yoruba language and liturgy, thus confirming the unity of a transnational religious community in which Abimbọla and other Yoruba priests were presumed to possess such great trans-historical memory—and enduring mastery of their shared, ancient religious origin—that he was qualified to mete out such generous praise. Indeed, his largesse was proof of his leadership. On the other hand, I have heard the discourse of "collective memory" used to resist Abimbọla's assertion of global leadership. The mulatto *babalao*, or divination priest, and president of the Yoruba Cultural Center of Cuba, Antonio Castañeda Márquez, told me in 1999 that his encounters with Nigerian *babalawos*, including Abimbọla, proved that colonization had caused the Nigerian priests to forget much of the tradition that Cuban *babalaos* had, through secrecy and literacy, managed to "remember." Contrary to what he surmised, from previous experience, was Abimbọla's intention, Nigerian priests had no authority over the Cubans.

Contrary to the assumptions implicit in the "roots," "survival" and "collective memory" metaphors, the world community of *orişa* worshippers is held together as much by a metahistorical vocabulary of debate—much of which it has come to share with the anthropologists—as by an objectively shared origin, practice, or

recollection of the past. This debate is a form of "dialogue," but so are the moments when worshippers from diverse locales choose to highlight the sameness of similarly named gods, their shared autonomy from Christian authority, and "Yoruba" religion's unique worthiness of respect among black Atlantic religious traditions.

Applied to this case, the "creolization" metaphor aptly captures the historical importance of diverse subordinate groups' mutually transformative interaction in the context of Euro-American dominance. However, with its assumption that African American cultures are essentially local phenomena requiring local explanation, the "creolization" metaphor entirely overlooks that translocal context of local identity-making, collective self-legitimization, and the struggle for authority. Far more than "survival," "roots," "collective memory," "creolization," "ships," and "rhizomes," the "dialogue" metaphor renders the ironic completely comprehensible. Sometimes, the whitest among us—like Antonio Castañeda Márquez and the Italian *candomblecistas* of São Paulo—become the most African. Such is the power of metaphor in self-fashioning, and such is the power of "dialogue" over mere "roots," "survivals," and "collective memories."

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